

A Pre-Christian 'God' on a Cross?

THE
ORPHEOS
BAKKIKOS
GEM
REEXAMINED

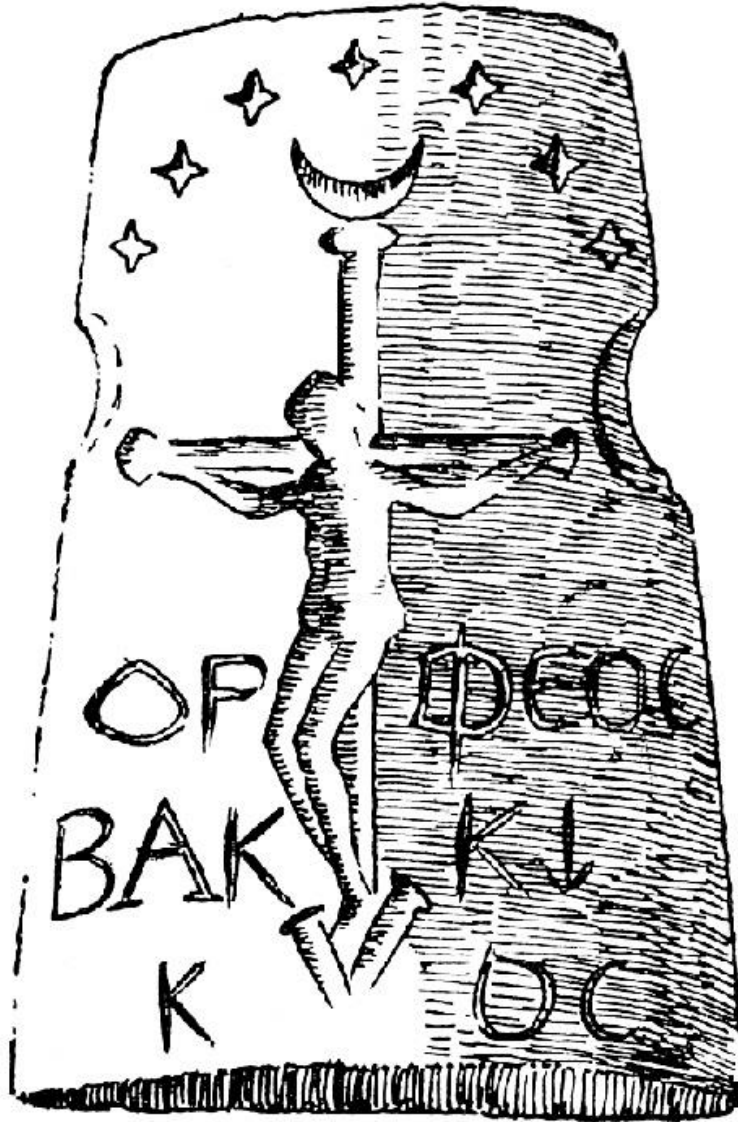


D.M. Murdock
Author of **CHRIST IN EGYPT**

A Pre-Christian ‘God’ on a Cross?

The Orpheos Bakkikos Gem Reexamined

By D.M. Murdock



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Cover image: Line drawing of Orpheos Bakkikos ornament by August Becker, from Eisler's *Orpheus* (1921), plate 31.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Table of Contents | iv |
| A Pre-Christian ‘God’ on a Cross? | 1 |
| Christian Connection?..... | 2 |
| A Late Forgery?..... | 3 |
| Zahn and Reil | 3 |
| ‘Orpheos Bakkikos’ Inscription | 5 |
| Variant Spellings | 6 |
| Hematite and Carnelian Gems | 6 |
| Orphism and Christian Mysticism..... | 7 |
| The Iobakchoi..... | 7 |
| Roman ‘Good Friday’ Liturgy | 8 |
| Julius, Bacchus and Orpheus..... | 8 |
| The ‘New Dionysus’ | 9 |
| Eleusinian Mysteries..... | 9 |
| Resurrection and Ascension | 10 |
| Justin Martyr | 10 |
| Sons of Jupiter | 11 |
| No ‘Being Crucified?’ | 11 |
| Staked and Affixed to a Cross | 12 |
| Trophies | 14 |
| Sign of the Cross | 14 |
| Plato’s World Soul and Just Man | 16 |
| Ixion in Cruciform..... | 17 |
| Prometheus Crucified | 17 |
| Andromeda Chained | 18 |
| Julius’s Funeral..... | 18 |
| The <i>Tropaeum</i> | 19 |
| Tertullian..... | 19 |
| Minucius | 20 |
| The Pozzuoli and Other Crucifixes | 21 |
| Gaza..... | 21 |
| Chrestos | 22 |
| Trophy Coin | 22 |
| Triad Imagery | 23 |
| Primitive Dionysus? | 24 |
| Herakles | 24 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Buddha | 25 |
| Mithra | 25 |
| From Cruciform to Dramatic Death | 26 |
| Human Sacrifice | 27 |
| The Cult of Julius | 27 |
| Ides of March | 28 |
| Liberalia Celebration | 29 |
| Phallic Symbols and Priapus | 29 |
| Meaning of Bakkikos | 30 |
| Dionysian Suffering? | 30 |
| Marsyas at the Stake | 31 |
| The Kings of Ai | 32 |
| The Moon and Stars | 32 |
| Lunar Resurrection Symbol | 33 |
| Resurrection Coin | 34 |
| Aureus of Divus Caesar | 35 |
| Crucified and Resurrected Divine Savior | 36 |
| Conclusion | 36 |
| Bibliography | 38 |

A Pre-Christian ‘God’ on a Cross?

“I am not sure that the stone is genuine, but I have long suspected that it is genuine. Now that I have investigated the reasons for why it should be a forgery, I am even more inclined to think that it after all is genuine. It seems like the fundamental reason for the forgery proponents to discard it as a forgery is that they believe that it depicts Jesus; and then they say that Jesus was not depicted that way in ancient time (which is not entirely correct). But why should we believe that the crucified figure is Jesus, when the inscription says something else?”

Roger Viklund, “ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ. Del 8—A Brief Summary in English”

The present paper represents a commentary on the famous ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ or “Orpheos Bakkikos” amulet that has been the subject of debate for a century now. My analysis draws to a significant extent from the article “Orpheus Bakkikos—The Missing Cross” by independent Italian historian Francesco Carotta.¹ Carotta is “mainly known for his theory that statesman Gaius Julius Caesar was the historical Jesus, that the Gospel is a rewriting of Roman historical sources, and that Christianity developed from the cult of the deified Caesar.” We learn from Wikipedia that, unsurprisingly, “Carotta’s work is generally ignored in academic circles.”

Excerpted from his book *Jesus was Caesar—On the Julian Origin of Christianity*, Carotta’s analysis of this amulet, gemstone, ringstone or magical talisman in reality is quite eye opening. I do not concur with the notion that the gospel story of Jesus was based solely on the life of the pre-Christian Roman dictator Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), since many other figures evidently were utilized to create the mythical Christ composite, including Julius’s grandnephew and Rome’s first emperor, Caesar Augustus (63 BCE-14 AD/CE).² However, in my estimation Carotta has made a sufficient case for an important piece of the Jesus-myth puzzle, and here I will highlight only from his paper on the gem and not address the larger work.

Although the tiny Orpheos ornament disappeared during World War II from the Berlin Bode Museum,³ there exist drawings and photographs of both it and a cast of it made in modern times. In 2001, a line drawing of the artifact was pictured on the cover of Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy’s *The Jesus Mysteries*, which created a bit of a sensation, as apologists scrambled to debunk the object because of its similarities to supposed “Christian” iconography. Very soon, cries of “forgery!” were ringing out on the internet and beyond, and the integrity of the *Jesus Mysteries* authors was impugned with fury, for exposing the amulet to the light of day. But were such charges of forgery appropriate and based on a thorough scientific investigation?

¹ Some of Carotta’s article is a bit obscure, evidently because it is a translation from Italian, which is one reason for this review, in order to disseminate more widely this information important to comparative religion and mythology studies.

² See my books *The Christ Conspiracy* (2nd edition), *Suns of God* and *Christ in Egypt*, as well as other writings, for more information on Jesus as a fictional composite of characters, many of whom were ancient gods and goddesses.

³ Viklund: “Two years after the German archaeologist Eduard Gerhard died in 1867, this item was donated to the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (now the Bode Museum). Originally it came from Italy. In 1904 the item became part of a permanent exhibition and was there up until World War II, when for some unknown reason it disappeared from the exhibition and has since then been missing.”



Orpheus Bakkikos amulet with case
(Carotta, citing "Wulff 1905, 234, #1146, pl. 56.")



Image of the cast, magnified

Christian Connection?

As part of the literature associating the Orpheus artifact with Christianity but not questioning its antiquity, in the early 20th century biblical scholar Dr. Robert Eisler (1882-1949) labeled the object the "crucified Christ as Orpheus."⁴ In *Orpheus—The Fisher*, Eisler provides an interesting analysis, along with a contemporary Judeo-Christian view of the gemstone:

The engraving shows the crucified Christ hanging on a cross, the astro-mystical interpretation of which is made evident by the superposition of the crescent and the seven stars; most probably the Pleiads or "Lyre of Orpheus," are meant. Then the cross itself is probably to be identified with the * * *, the main stars of Orion, whom the ancients...sometimes held to be the constellation of Dionysos. The inscription "Orpheus Bakkikos" is intended to identify the crucified Messiah with the "Orpheus" of the Bacchic mysteries. The ring-stone, which certainly belonged to an Orphic initiate, who had turned Christian without giving up completely his old religious beliefs, is attributed to the 3rd or 4th century A.D. It cannot be much earlier in any case considering the late introduction of the *crucifixus* type into Christian art.⁵

The Orpheus image does appear to be strikingly "Christian" at first glance, in that it is a depiction of a man hanging on a cross, like Christ's traditional crucifixion scene. However, as we know from evidence of gods and other anthropomorphic figures on crosses and cruciforms in antiquity,⁶ some of which will be shown here, this artifact need not have anything to do with Christianity, except that the latter evidently emulated the concept of the former.

Although he was a Jewish historian, Eisler was a defender of traditional Christian history; hence, his analysis echoes the belief in the gospel story as taking place in history in some capacity at the

⁴ Eisler, xiv.

⁵ Eisler, pl. 31, p. 3 of illustrations.

⁶ See my article "Pre-Christian Gods on Crosses or in Cruciform" and related posts at my forum.

traditional time. His works were very influential, and most scholars accepted that the gem was authentically ancient. Previous to Eisler, in 1896 German archaeologist and gem expert Dr. Adolf Furtwängler (1853-1907) had written about the object, with no suspicion concerning its authenticity.

The discussion by Eisler of the “astro-mysticism” or “astro-mythology”—basically the same as astrolatry, astral religion, stellar theology or astrotheology—explains the existence of the artifact without need for a Christian origin or context.

Indeed, one must state here that, if the cross represents the constellation of Orion, associated with the Greek god Dionysos/Dionysus, there exists no reason either to doubt the artifact’s authenticity or to suggest that it is Christian or influenced by Christianity.

A Late Forgery?

Carotta introduces his thesis by addressing the apparently hasty claim and rush to judgment that the ornament is a fake. This premature dismissal was made by various German scholars, for example, including ancient art expert Dr. Robert Zahn (1870-1945) and early Christian crucifixion expert and pastor Dr. Johannes Reil (fl. 1904).⁷ Zahn and Reil’s arguments influenced linguist Dr. Otto Kern (1863-1942), who originally believed the gem to be genuine but later clarified that it could be spurious.⁸ Throughout his paper, Carotta refutes this contention of forgery, while I add other evidence to illustrate the gem’s probable authenticity.

The facts that the provenance of this piece is unknown, and that forgery of art and artifacts since antiquity has been common, provide two of the rationales for suspecting its inauthenticity. However, when one knows the context and milieu in which this artifact could have been created, there remains no real ground to maintain that it is bogus.

Other than a lack of origin and the commonality of forgery—much of it by Christians over the centuries—the main reason the gem was dismissed seems to be that it was uncomfortable to Christian authorities, who insisted that the figure’s posture indicated the object was created during the 17th or 18th centuries, when Christ purportedly was first depicted in the same “bent-knee” fashion.

Zahn and Reil

Published in 1926, Zahn and Reil’s arguments against the Orpheos gem’s authenticity are as follows, according to a forum post by Andrew Criddle:

The depiction of the crucified figure is medieval rather than Late Antique.

The cross is Latin in shape + as in later depictions of crucifixion rather than the T shaped cross (and other variants) typical before 500 CE.

The depiction of the crucified figure as alone without crucifiers co-crucified or devotees is unparalleled in antiquity and only appears later.

⁷ See the article “ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ” by R. Zahn and J. Reil, (*Angelos*, vol. 2, 1926; 62 ff.). For an overview of Zahn-Reil’s arguments, see also Viklund, “Summary,” etc.

⁸ Kern, 11.476.

The image of the moon and seven stars is very strange but may be a later development of the early symbolic use of the sun and moon in images of the crucifixion with the sun removed in response to the claim in the synoptic Gospels that the sun was darkened.⁹

Zahn and Reil's objections are based on iconography, which is not an exact science and the available record for which was less complete in their time than it is now, with the current greater global access to data and to scholars in other countries and in different languages. In other words, the arguments of these two scholars, Zahn and Reil, are outdated.¹⁰

As we will see, the crucifix image and cross shape need not follow Christian iconographical chronology at all. Hence, Zahn-Reil's first two objections are rebutted, because the artifact demonstrably is pagan, and pagans themselves depicted humans crucified or in cruciform and used a variety of cross shapes, dating back many thousands of years.¹¹

Regarding the third objection about the crucified figure not standing alone, again, since we evidently are not dealing with a Christian artifact, this artistic limitation also need not apply. The small Orpheus amulet of a mere nine by 14 millimeters has little room for a more extensive depiction, but it does in fact possess two conical objects on either side, remaining within the typical *pre-Christian* (and Christian) symbolic formula of a trio. In reality, Zahn-Reil's objection serves to illustrate my point here about the typical triad imagery or "trinity" from pre-Christian antiquity.

Concerning the fourth criticism, as we will also see from other ancient artifacts and as we know from the fact that the ancients practiced astral religion or astrolatry, also styled "astrotheology," the moon and stars in the Orpheus amulet are not strange at all. In reality, we would expect them to be there, and they make sense, within the artifact's proper context.

Thus, Zahn and Reil's objections are outdated, lacking the data we possess currently, and erroneous, because they assume *a priori* that the artifact was influenced by Christianity and, therefore, simply could not be real, according to received Christian history and iconographic chronology. If the artifact is not Christian, however, none of Zahn and Reil's criticisms is valid.

Italian archaeologist Dr. Attilio Mastrocinque likewise addressed Zahn and Reil's criticisms, as well as those of German professor Dr. Peter Maser (b. 1943), an evangelical theologian who also dismissed the artifact as counterfeit. Mastrocinque summarizes the main criticisms thus:

- 1) In the past there have been many counterfeiting engravers of gems, although it is not clear from where or with the help of which learned persons the forger had conceived the inscription; 2) the position of the crucifix presupposes the use of the three nails, which occurs in the twelfth century, while this type of cross is found only in the sixth century, and also the crucifix alone does not appear before the ninth century...¹²

Regarding the first and other objections based on purported anachronistic iconography, Mastrocinque concludes:

⁹ Andrew Criddle, Internet Infidels forum, via bede.org.uk/orpheus.htm.

¹⁰ It is ironic, therefore, that, while critics of my work contend erroneously that I employ "outdated" sources, they seem to overlook the obsolescence of arguments such as Zahn and Reil's, which favor Christian tradition.

¹¹ See also Murdock (2009), 335ff.

¹² Mastrocinque, 18.

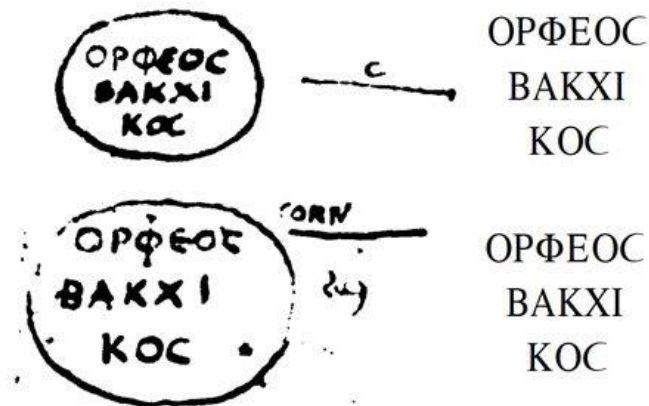
It also is not a good method for those who first create an evolutionary pattern of iconography and of a number of types then to eliminate as false any document that does not fit into their classification. It is known that in ancient gems are conserved sometimes images that have few comparisons elsewhere.¹³

Mastrocinque goes on to provide evidence for the gemstone's authenticity, while Viklund imparts additional reasons for doubting that the amulet is fake:

- 1) None of those who have examined the object found anything suspicious in the way the incision was done.
- 2) The objections were solely based on comparisons made to early depictions of Jesus on the cross.
- 3) Even though they claimed that there were a number of unique things in the depiction, every one of those so-called unique characteristics are found in other older motives and often also in images of Jesus on the cross. The only things that are missing, like nails through the feet, are also missing on the ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ-stone.
- 4) There are at least four other inscriptions saying ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ or something very similar.
- 5) The crucified Orpheus is done with hanging arms and the head above the crossbeam, precisely as is done on the earliest depictions of Jesus on the cross.¹⁴

'Orpheos Bakkikos' Inscription

Mastrocinque provides images of other artifacts of the time that include the inscription "Orpheos Bakkikos" or other spelling, such as "Bakkhikos," referring to the Dionysian epithet "Bacchus." Mastrocinque recounts that gems in the collection of Fabbretti and Andreini have the same basic inscription of "Orpheos Bakkhikos."¹⁵ Hence, the inscription would not be anachronistic and would exemplify doctrines and rites of the Bacchic cultus.



Line drawing of inscriptions on gemstones (Notebook of Filippo Buonarroti, 1661-1733)

¹³ Mastrocinque, 8.

¹⁴ Viklund, "Summary."

¹⁵ Mastrocinque (19) cites A1.33.578 and A1.44 in the Fabbretti and Adreini collection.

Following the path of these gems, Mastrocinque surmises that they came from the catacombs of the Church of Saints Marcellinus and Peter at Rome, where also is located an early Orphic crypt: "It is therefore likely that the gems in question came from this catacomb, also in view of the fact that the few gems of the genre with a known origin have been found in the catacombs."¹⁶ It is noteworthy also that these catacombs are where an image of Christ as Orpheus likewise was discovered (right), an important artifact dating to the fourth century that demonstrates a link between Christianity and Orphism, the religion of the legendary Thracian demigod Orpheus/Orpheus.



Within academia there has been another hasty dismissal of these artifacts as "fakes," using the same arguments applied to the main Orpheos gemstone discussed here.¹⁷ However, for the same reasons demonstrated here to declare the artifact genuine, there is little reason to suspect these others are counterfeits. Viklund points out that forgeries often represent imitations of artifacts which already exist, and, if objects with this inscription *did* exist, why should these gemstones be declared forgeries and not the original objects themselves?¹⁸

Variant Spellings

The lack of uniform spelling of Bakkhikos could indicate either in favor of or against the artifact's authenticity. The fact there was evidently more than one gemstone with this inscription, with variant spellings, indicates that there would have been more than one object for potential counterfeiters to copy. Again, we are left with multiple original artifacts with this inscription. A modern counterfeiter unfamiliar with ancient Greek might make a mistake in engraving, but if he had an original before him with the correct spelling, he would have to be declared incompetent, as his carelessness would immediately cast suspicion on the object as a forgery. It is more likely that ancient carvers, who need not have been literate or fluent in Greek, made these variant spellings.

If these other gems are authentic, as is the most scientific conclusion, we would not be without precedent or possible provenance for similar artifacts. Other collections contain even more gems with the same basic inscription as found on the Orpheos gem in question. Thus, the inscription itself is indicative of the artifact's authenticity, and there is nothing Christian about it.

Hematite and Carnelian Gems

Many ancient Gnostic magical and other Orphic gems or intaglios, including those artifacts discussed above with similar inscriptions, were carved from a carnelian or bloodstone.¹⁹ So too is our Orpheos amulet made out of "blood-red ferric oxide" or hematite, from the Greek word for "blood," as in "hematology." Hence, the medium also is



¹⁶ Mastrocinque, 20

¹⁷ See, e.g., Spier.

¹⁸ Viklund, "OPHEOC BAKKIKOC. Del 6 – inskriptionen."

¹⁹ Carotta, 2. A carnelian is a red or reddish chalcedony or quartz.

appropriate to the era and indicative of the artifact's authenticity.

Despite the evidence demonstrating the gem to be genuine and non-Christian, Mastrocinque attempts in his analysis to maintain the artifact as a Christian depiction, which is unnecessary, in light of what we are discussing in the present work. In reality, such a presumption will prevent us from determining exactly what the amulet represents.

Like Mastrocinque, Viklund and others, Carotta also shows the criticisms based on iconography to be false, providing similar images from antiquity and establishing the case for authenticity. I will not reproduce his entire argument but will confine most of my comments to excerpts I include here, examining many of the reasons for evincing that the artifact is genuine. It is noteworthy that the Orpheos gemstone or ringstone was convincing enough in its authenticity that, rather than contending it to be a fake, a number of scholars believed the Christian crucifixion motif was adopted *from* Orphism.²⁰

Orphism and Christian Mysticism

Discussing the debate of whether or not the artifact is Christian, Carotta raises up the popularity of the Orphic cult of Dionysus, commenting:

...the Orpheos Bakkikos need not necessarily be Christian—after all, neither is the inscription. Still, most opinions that shed doubt on the stone's authenticity are based on a *petitio principii* [circular reasoning]: It is a methodological error *a priori* to declare something potentially non-Christian as Christian and consequently—instead of looking for possible ancient non-Christian precursors—rather postulate a case of forgery, simply because it contradicts a prefabricated Christian evolutionary pattern. But if we take the...Iobakchoi into consideration, whose cult of the Orphic Mysteries shows striking parallels to Christian martyr mysticism—which had become common knowledge at the latest since [French priest and theologian Rev. Alfred] Loisy [1857-1940] and explains mysteries like the works of Nonnus, who in the fifth century wrote the *Dionysiaca* together with a paraphrase of the fourth gospel, we notice that the Dionysian cult societies were traditionally widespread in the Hellenistic region. There they had contributed decisively to the development of the tragedy, and their technitai organized theater performances...²¹

The Iobakchoi

The Athenian religious sectarians called "Iobakchoi" or "Iobacchi" were followers of Dionysus or Bacchus, also styled Iakkhos or Iacchus, reflecting a society that included numerous prominent authority figures and members of the elite.²² As part of his thesis, Carotta asserts that "the affiliation of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone to the society of the *Iobakchoi*...has now been verified."²³

²⁰ Carotta (5) cites R.F. Paget, *In the Footsteps of Orpheus* (London, 1967), 79: "Paget...follows Eisler and even regards the Orpheos Bakkikos stone as proof both of Orpheus' crucifixion and of the Christian adoption of the crucifixion from Orphism..."

²¹ Carotta, 14.

²² See Ptolemy's discussion (*Geographia*, 4, 5, 23 [c]) of the Athenian Ἰόβακχοι *Iobakchoi*.

²³ Carotta, 22.

Concerning its elite nature and influence, we read: "From the connection with a great local celebrity and millionaire, Herodes, and the size of membership fees, it is clear that this group was more middle- than lower-class."²⁴ Interestingly, this group reached its height in power in Attica, Greece, during the precise time when the canonical gospels suddenly spring into view, the 170s AD/CE.²⁵

Carotta further mentions the "structural parallels between the Iobakchoi and early Christian parishes," as well as "Christian mysticism's many similarities to the Dionysian Mysteries."²⁶ In this regard, he cites the works both of pagans such as Nonnus (5th cent. AD/CE) and of Christians such as Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 430-489) and Decimius Magnus Ausonius (c. 310-c. 395), who merged Dionysianism/Orphism with Christianity in ancient times. Hence, it does not surprise us if Christianity borrowed Orphic symbolism as well, including the crucifix.

Roman 'Good Friday' Liturgy

Speaking of various artifacts and images from antiquity similar in one aspect or another to the Orpheos gem, Carotta comments that the influence of Roman religion on the Christian effort is well established:

One such articulated wax figure is...historically documented for the first century BCE, namely in the sources on the funeral of Julius Caesar. One could of course believe that this has nothing to do with Christianity, but the influence of the Roman imperial cult on the Christian religion has long been established, and the theologian Ethelbert Stauffer determined already in the 1950s that the Good Friday liturgy does not follow the Gospel, but the funerary ritual of Caesar.²⁷

Here Carotta also contends that one aspect of Christianity, the "Good Friday Liturgy," derives not from the death of a historical Jesus but from Julius's funeral.

Julius, Bacchus and Orpheus

In his thesis identifying Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ, Carotta makes the argument that the Orpheos gem is part of the cult of the deified Roman statesmen, *Divus Iulius* in Latin, representing an articulated wax effigy of Julius purportedly displayed during the latter's funerary service. In turn, it is surmised that the artifact reflects Caesar's part in the ancient, widespread and powerful cult of Dionysus; hence, the inscription "Orpheos Bakkikos."

Orpheos or Orpheus is a legendary figure with a role much like that of the Christian saint Paul of Tarsus, who is depicted as proselytizing the "good news" of Jesus around the Mediterranean. The same role was occupied for centuries before the common era by Orpheus, who was said to spread the "good news" of Dionysus/Bacchus around the Mediterranean, using a similar route as Paul, which passes through traditional sites of famous brotherhoods and mystery schools. In this regard, numerous texts and verses were composed pseudepigraphically in Orpheus's name.

²⁴ MacMullen, 69.

²⁵ See my book *Who Was Jesus?* for the late dating of the canonical gospels, which do not emerge clearly in the historical record until the second half of the second century.

²⁶ Carotta, 14.

²⁷ Carotta, 14.

The 'New Dionysus'

Carotta delves into the background of this Dionysian cult, again revealing how popular it was, especially among the elite, who often claimed to be the god himself. The Italian scholar lists several leaders who called themselves the "New Dionysus":

Following the example of Alexander, Ptolemy Auletes, Mithridates and Antony, the emperors of the Baetica Trajan and Hadrian as well as Antoninus Pius, who was related to the *Anni* by marriage, called themselves "New Dionysus."²⁸

A favored god of Alexander the Great, Dionysus's worship extended around the Mediterranean and into India, with the proliferation of viticulture or grapevine cultivation and viniculture or wine production.

By the centuries around the common era, viticulture and viniculture, along with their attendant cultus, had been established in many places for hundreds to thousands of years, representing an important aspect of the Mediterranean economy of the time, as they do to this day. Moreover, there were theaters of Dionysus around the Roman Empire, where Orphic proselytizers of the god performed "passion plays" for the rich and powerful, including the priests and priestesses of other Greek sects.

Eleusinian Mysteries

Included in this important cult were the famed Eleusinian mysteries, as well as various infamous bacchanal rites. The main deities of Eleusis were the earth and grain goddess Demeter or Ceres and her daughter, the vernal virgin Persephone or Kore, both of whom in different myths serve as the mother of Dionysus/Bacchus.²⁹ In evident reverence of the highly important and very ancient god of the vine and wine, during the renowned procession that opened the Eleusinian mysteries, devotees would shout "Iakkhe!," understood as an invocation of Dionysus using his epithet Iakkhos or Iacchus.³⁰

It has been surmised that, as were many of his peers, including Cicero, Sulla and Antony, as well as later emperors such as Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian and Domitian, Julius Caesar was an initiate in the Eleusinian mysteries,³¹ as he evidently was in the cult of Dionysus in general.

Even if Eisler is correct and the Orpheos artifact represents a ringstone of an Orphic initiate, it still could belong to Julius, who was the "New Dionysus" and likely an initiate into the Eleusinian mysteries, which revolved significantly around the grandmother/mother of Dionysus/Bacchus.

Concerning various Dionysian festivities, such as those held at the time of the Eleusinian mysteries, we read:

While the Athenians celebrated Dionysus in various one-day festivals (including those during the Eleusinian Mysteries), a far older tradition was the two-year cycle where the

²⁸ Carotta, 15.

²⁹ See my article, "Dionysus: Born of a Virgin on December 25th, Killed and Resurrected after Three Days."

³⁰ See Aristophanes, *Frogs* 316ff; Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades* 34.3; Herodotus, *Histories* 8.65.4; Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandri* 2.16; Virgil, *Georgics* 2.166; and Plutarch, *Themistocles* 15.

³¹ See, e.g., "Was Julius Caesar Initiated into the Mysteries of Eleusis?" by George Beke Latura.

death and absence of Dionysus (in his aspect of Dionysus Chthonios, Lord of the Underworld) was mourned for a year. During the second year, his resurrection (as Dionysus Bacchus) was celebrated at the Tristeria and other festivals (including one marked by the rising of Sirius).³²

Hence, it appears that the title of “Bacchus” is related specifically to the resurrected Dionysus.

Resurrection and Ascension

As part of his mysteries and rites, Dionysus’s death, resurrection and ascension were famous in ancient times, so much so that early Christian father Origen (c. 184-c. 254) felt the need to address these elements in his *Contra Celsum* (4.17), comparing them unfavorably to those of Christ:

But will not those narratives, especially when they are understood in their proper sense, appear far more worthy of respect than the story that Dionysus was deceived by the Titans, and expelled from the throne of Jupiter, and torn in pieces by them, and his remains being afterwards put together again, he returned as it were once more to life, and ascended to heaven?³³

Since Dionysus was said to die, resurrect and ascend ritually, it is reasonable to suggest that rulers or other “new Dionysii” likewise were asserted to rise anew, ascending into heaven. Indeed, like Dionysus, Julius was killed hideously and claimed to resurrect from the dead and rise into heaven as a god.

Justin Martyr

In the famous chapter 21 in his [*First Apology*](#), entitled “Analogies to the history of Christ,” early Church father Justin Martyr (c. 150 AD/CE) referred to the Roman ruler’s deification and ascension:

And what of the emperors who die among yourselves, whom you deem worthy of deification, and in whose behalf you produce some one who swears he has seen the burning Caesar rise to heaven from the funeral pyre?³⁴

The alleged vision of Caesar rising to heaven was asserted in antiquity, based on a purported comet at the time of his murder.³⁵ This “Caesar’s Comet” event of 44 BCE served as a basis for the cult of Divus Iulius or “Divine Julius,” when the leader’s grandnephew and adopted son



³² “Dionysian mysteries,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysian_Mysteries. It should be noted that Dionysus’s Egyptian counterpart, Osiris, lord of the underworld, afterlife and resurrection, was also said to be heralded by Sirius at his birth.

³³ Roberts (1872), 176.

³⁴ Roberts (1905), 1.170.

³⁵ See, e.g., Suetonius (1.88): “...a comet appeared about an hour before sunset and shone for seven days running. This was held to be Caesar’s soul, elevated to Heaven; hence the star, now placed above the forehead of his divine image.” (Suetonius/Graves, 43-44)

Octavian/Augustus compelled the senate to declare the celestial occurrence as a sign of Caesar's divinity. In commemoration, in around 17 to 18 BCE Augustus minted the coin above right, which presents Octavian's own head and designation on the obverse, with the reverse displaying the comet with eight rays, one of which in the top row serves as the celestial object's tail. In between the two sets of four rays is the inscription "Divus Iuliu." This deification in the afterlife evidently was a promise of the Eleusinian mysteries, explaining the burst of apotheosized emperors from Augustus onwards.

Sons of Jupiter

Earlier in the same chapter (21), Justin makes the notorious admission that Christian claims concerning Christ are "nothing different" from assertions regarding pagan gods:

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter.³⁶

Here this early Christian authority essentially equates the "life of Christ" with the myths of pre-Christian pagan gods. In his assertion about the "sons of Jupiter" being "crucified," Justin's original Latin is *crucifixum*,³⁷ which the Greek translation renders σταυρωθέντα *staurothenta*, related to σταυρός *stauros*, meaning "stake" or "cross," the precise word used in the Bible to describe the instrument upon which Jesus was hung or impaled.³⁸

In my comparative religion studies, I have spent many years following Justin's lead to discover which of the "sons of Jupiter" or Jove/J Zeus—in other words, various Greek and Roman gods (and goddesses)—was born without sexual union, was crucified and died, rose again and ascended into heaven. In this quest, I have brought forth on numerous occasions the primary sources for Justin's claim, one of the most honest admissions in all of Christian history.

Ancient Greeks and Romans, including and especially those involved in or aware of the cult of the caesars as divine beings, obviously knew the stories of various gods, godmen or divinized emperors and heroes who died and were resurrected. What about those notables who were "crucified?" To reiterate, there were [numerous deities, heroes and so on represented on a cross or in cruciform](#) in antiquity.

No 'Being Crucified?'

Hence, Justin's subsequent disclaimer in chapter 55, in which he asserts that "in no instance, not even in any of those called sons of Jupiter, did they imitate the being crucified,"³⁹ appears disingenuous and contradictory. Although this passage is used to contend that there were no pre-Christian human figures on crosses, Justin himself stated earlier that, in making claims about

³⁶ Roberts (1905), 1.170.

³⁷ Justin. *Apologia Prima* (MPG 6.327.440), 359.

³⁸ E.g., Matthew 27:40. For the definition of *stauros* as "cross," see *Strong's* (G4716) and *Thayer's Lexicon* (586). All though *Liddell & Scott* does not identify *stauros* as "cross," *per se*, the lexicon does include its crucial meaning when defining the related forms *stauroó*, *anastauroó* and *staurophoros*, the latter of which *Liddell & Scott* (1900:743, 62) defines as "bearing the cross." *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary* also describes *stauroo*, *sustauroo* and *anastauroo* in terms of "crucifixion" and "crucifying."

³⁹ Roberts (1905), 1.181.

Jesus being “crucified”—*his* word—Christians “propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter.”

In the previous chapter (54), Justin refers to prescient “devils” who, anticipating Christ’s advent, bewitched the ancient poets to write about the savior’s pagan counterfeits. Next (ch. 55), Justin states, in his original Latin text:

*Nusquam autem nec in ullo eorum, qui dicuntur, Jovis filiorum crucis supplicum imitati sunt.*⁴⁰

The literal translation is:

Nowhere, however, not even in any of them who are called sons of Jove, [the] punishment of the cross are they imitating.

The Greek translation of the pertinent passage in Justin is:

Ἄλλ’ οὐδαμοῦ οὐδ’ ἐπὶ τινος τῶν λεγομένων υἱῶν τοῦ Διὸς τὸ σταυρωθῆναι ἐμιμήσαντο.

This sentence is rendered literally as:

But in no way, not even concerning any of the so-called sons of (the) Zeus, the [one] to be crucified did they imitate.

Note that the Greek word here often translated as “Jupiter” or “Jove” is Διὸς *Dios*, the genitive or possessive of “Zeus” and essentially meaning “God,” as in the *dios* of Spanish, the *dio* of Italian, the *deus* of Latin, the *dyaus* of Sanskrit and so on.⁴¹

As it does in chapter 21, in chapter 55 the Greek translation of Justin also employs the verb σταυρόω *stauroó* to express “to be crucified.” The same form σταυρωθῆναι *staurōthēnai* is used in the New Testament as well, to describe Christ’s crucifixion.⁴² Ancient writers Strabo (*Geo.* 14.1.39) and Epictetus (*Disc.* 2.2.20) likewise use the form σταυρωθῆναι, the former in recounting a tale about a mountain called Thorax, upon which “Daphitas the grammarian is said to have been crucified.”⁴³

Staked and Affixed to a Cross

Thus, the verb σταυρόω *stauroó*, meaning “to fence with stakes, to crucify,” was utilized in pre-Christian antiquity, such as by ancient writers Diodorus, Herodotus, Homer, Pausanias, Strabo and Thucydides. Strabo (64/63 BCE-c. 24 AD/CE) also uses a form of *stauroó* (σταυρῶν) to describe crucified inhabitants of the northern Iberian Peninsula: “It is a proof of the ferocity of

⁴⁰ *MPG*, 411.

⁴¹ Martin B. Matušík (20-21): “*Deus* is the Latin translation from the Greek *theos*. The supreme *theos* among the many Greek (male and female) *theoi* was *Zeus* (genitive *Dios*)... Italian, Spanish and French words for ‘God’ derive from this genitive form of the wicked *theos* *Zeus* (gen. form *Dios*), and from the Greek *theos* or Latin *Deus* (Italian for God is *Il Dio*, Spanish *Dios*, French *Dieu*).” See also: “The *Dyaus* pitar or *devas* became the *Daevas*, in Greek *Theos* or *Zeus*; in Latin *Deus* and in the Romance languages: French, *Dieu*; Spanish, *Dios*; and Italians, *Divus*, almost the same with its original form.” [cite]

⁴² Matthew 26:2; Luke 23:23, 24:7. At Matthew 26:2, in fact, we have the same phrase: τὸ σταυρωθῆναι *to staurōthēnai*, rendered generally “to be crucified,” without the article τὸ, meaning “the (one)” or “that which.”

⁴³ Strabo/Sterrett, 6.249.

the Cantabrians, that a number of them having been taken prisoners and fixed to the cross, they chanted songs of triumph.”⁴⁴

A form of the word *stauroó* is used only once in the Greek Old Testament or Septuagint, at Esther 7:9, in which the term is *σταυρωθήτω staurothēto*, in referencing to the hanging of the king's vizier Haman from the gallows. In the next verse (Est 7:10), the reiteration of hanging from wood is made, using the same terms as found in the New Testament, in the book of Acts (5:30), depicting Jesus hanging on a tree. Hence, we have *stauros* and wood/tree hanging in the same context.

In addition to the verb *σταυρόω stauroó* is *ἀνασταυρόω anastauróō*, meaning to “impale on a stake” or “affix to a cross,” sometimes connoting “again” or “anew.” One form or another of the word *ἀνασταυρόω anastauróō* is utilized by numerous writers in antiquity, including Aelian, Chariton, Clement Alexandrinus, Diodorus, Herodotus, Josephus, Lucian, Plato, Plutarch, Strabo, Thucydides and Xenophon.

As one example, writing during the fifth century BCE, Greek historian Herodotus (3.125) mentions the murder and crucifixion of the Greek king Polycrates (c. 538-522 BCE) by Oroetes, governor of Sardis. To describe Oroetes having “crucified” the king, Herodotus uses the form *ἀνεσταύρωσε*, from *ἀνασταυρόω anastauróō*. Polycrates's body subsequently was hung in the air, and he “was washed by Zeus when it rained, and he was anointed by Helios as he exuded sweat from his body.”⁴⁵

Derived from *anastauróō*, the term *ἀνασταυρῶσαι anastaurosai* is used by Diodorus (3.65.5) to depict the crucifixion of Dionysus's enemy, Lycurgus:

καὶ τὸν Λυκοῦργον ζωγρήσαντα τυφλῶσαί τε καὶ πᾶσαν αἰκίαν εἰσενεγκάμενον
ἀνασταυρῶσαι.

Diodorus recounts that, after Lycurgus cut the throats of the Bacchantes or followers of Dionysus, the god took the king prisoner, plucked out his eyes, tortured and abused him, and “nailed him to the cross.”⁴⁶ Here we have the torment and crucifixion of a sinful king by a god, similar in these particulars to the passion and crucifixion of the King of kings, Jesus, ordained by God for the expiation of mankind's sins. As it was with Jesus, Lycurgus's tale sounds like a typical sacred-king, scapegoat ritual, to be discussed below.

A form of the same verb, *ἀνασταυροῦντας anastaurountas*, appears in the biblical Epistle to the Hebrews (6:6), to discuss the “crucifying” anew of Christ by those who “fall away” from him.

Obviously, the concept of impaling on a stake or affixing to a cross was common enough in antiquity that it could have been represented in imagery long before Christ was purported to have been crucified. Hence, there were many people crucified in antiquity, described with the same word as the “being crucified” in the New Testament.

⁴⁴ Strabo/Hamilton, 1.248.

⁴⁵ Herodotus/Godley.

⁴⁶ Diodorus/Booth, 1.206. The whole of Diodorus's original Greek is: διόπερ λάθρα τούτου διαπλεύσαντος πρὸς τὸ σφέτερον στρατόπεδον, τὸν μὲν Λυκοῦργόν φασιν ἐπιθέμενον ταῖς μαινάσιν ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ Νυσίῳ πάσας ἀποκτείνειν, τὸν δὲ Διόνυσον περαιώσαντα τὰς δυνάμεις μάχη κρατῆσαι τῶν Θρακῶν, καὶ τὸν Λυκοῦργον ζωγρήσαντα τυφλῶσαί τε καὶ πᾶσαν αἰκίαν εἰσενεγκάμενον **ἀνασταυρῶσαι.** In a private email to me, Carotta notes concerning Booth's translation of “nailed him to the cross” that “the ‘nails’ belong to the imagination of the translator, are a projection.”

Although the stories and myths of the “sons of Jupiter” may not specify that any of them was thrown to the ground and nailed to a cross, once more, numerous figures were depicted as fastened to a cross or in cruciform, as we shall see. Since it is thus fallacious to contend that in no instance was anyone portrayed as crucified, it would seem that Justin Martyr is mistaken, mendacious or misinterpreted.

Trophies

Indeed, even in the same paragraph (55), Justin goes on to compare the cross to the mast of a ship, as well as to the “trophy” and consecrations of the Romans and their emperors. At 55.3, concerning the cross, Justin remarks:

And the power of this form is shown by your own symbols on what are called standards and trophies, to the accompaniment of which all your state processions are made, using these as the signs of your rule and power, even though you do so without knowing. And with this form you set up the images of your deceased emperors, and you name them gods by inscriptions.⁴⁷

In the Latin translation of Justin’s work, the word for “trophy” is *tropaea*, which Justin associates with the Christian cross, a noteworthy fact discussed in greater detail below. Upon this cruciform trophy, Justin comments, are the deified images of emperors, recalling the wax figure of Julius purportedly erected at his funeral. In consideration of what is demonstrated here, Justin’s disclaimer in chapter 55 can be ignored as an erroneous apology that even he himself disproves.

Moreover, the emphasis on the pagan cross and cruciform by other early Church fathers, such as Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225 AD/CE), Origen⁴⁸ (2nd-3rd cents. AD/CE) and Minucius Felix (c. 2nd-3rd cents. AD/CE), likewise demonstrates that indeed they represent motifs attached to gods and men.

Sign of the Cross

As we learn from the insistence of early Church fathers such as Justin and Minucius, a human being with arms outstretched can be said to be making the sign of the cross.⁴⁹ In this regard, the very ancient artifact on the right not only is in cruciform but also wears a cross around its neck, displaying the importance of this cruciform imagery at least 2,500 years before the common era and possibly as early as 6,000 years ago.



⁴⁷ Justin/Barnard, 63.

⁴⁸ *Ioann.* 20.36.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Minucius (*Oct.* 29.7-8): “...when the military yoke is lifted up, it is as if a man adores God with a pure mind, with hands outstretched.” ...*et cum signum est, et cum homo porrectis manibus deum pura mente veneratur.*

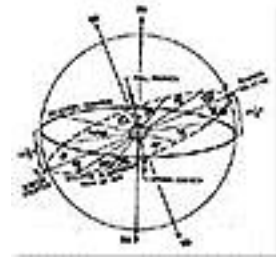
This crucial iconography did not begin or end with this artifact, however, as many other such pre-Christian cruciforms can be found, along with the highly important symbol of the cross in a variety of forms that often denote the great “God Sun,” light of the world and savior of mankind for thousands of years.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See my book *Suns of God* for more information.

Plato's World Soul and Just Man

In his *Timaeus* (36bc), Greek philosopher Plato (429-347 BCE) wrote about a “world soul” in the shape of a cross or X, hanging in space.⁵¹ As I write in *Christ in Egypt*, Plato's cross-like “world-soul” also represented the orbits of the sun and earth's ecliptic intersecting. This Platonic figure in turn was commonly taken to be a “foreshadowing” of the Christ character and cross. As theologian Rev. Dr. Hugo Rahner states:

...Adapting an old Pythagorean notion, Plato had written in the *Timaeus* of the world soul revealed in the celestial X; to the early Christian this was a pagan imitation of the world-building crucified Logos who encompasses the cosmos and causes it to revolve around the mystery of the Cross.⁵²



One of the early Christians who saw the Cross and Son of God revealed in Plato's writing was Justin, who in his *First Apology* (60.1), in a section entitled “Plato's Doctrine of the Cross,” remarked:

And the physiological discussion concerning the Son of God in the *Timæus* of Plato, where he says, “He placed him crosswise in the universe,” he borrowed in like manner from Moses...⁵³

The Church fathers insisted that the cross, although pre-Christian, nevertheless was biblical, appearing in the story of the Israelite prophet Moses when he raised his arms and supernaturally directed Israel's victory over the Amalekites.⁵⁴

Centuries before the common era, Plato also discussed a “just man” who is “crucified” (*Republic* 2.361-362), as related by Pope Benedict XVI (Cardinal Ratzinger):

...according to Plato the truly just man must be misunderstood and persecuted in this world; indeed, Plato [2.362a] goes so far as to write: “They will say that our just man will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burned out, and at last, after all manner of suffering will be crucified.” This passage, written four hundred years before Christ, is always bound to move a Christian deeply.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Plato, 49.

⁵² Campbell, 372.

⁵³ Roberts, *ANF*, I, 183; Justin/Gildersleeve, 55.

⁵⁴ Exodus 17:11: “Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Am'alek prevailed.” See, e.g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* (90): “When the people...waged war with Amalek, and the son of Nave (Nun), by name Jesus (Joshua), led the fight, Moses himself prayed to God, stretching out both hands, and Hur with Aaron supported them during the whole day, so that they might not hang down when he got wearied. For if he gave up any part of this sign, which was an imitation of the cross, the people were beaten, as is recorded in the writings of Moses; but if he remained in this form, Amalek was proportionally defeated, and he who prevailed prevailed by the cross. For it was not because Moses so prayed that the people were stronger, but because, while one who bore the name of Jesus (Joshua) was in the forefront of the battle, he himself made the sign of the cross.” (Roberts, 1870:2.213) Justin's Latin for “cross” here is *crucis/crucem*, while “sign of the cross” is *crucis signum*.

⁵⁵ Ratzinger (2004), 353.

The ex-pope used a translation of Plato specifically rendering the Greek as “crucified” in describing the fate of the “just man,”⁵⁶ who was given essentially the same treatment as Lycurgus described in Diodorus. This Platonic passage much resembles the “man of sorrows” and “suffering servant” found at Isaiah 53:4-12 and, along with that OT “messianic prophecy,” likely was used as a *blueprint* in the creation of the Christ character.⁵⁷ Again, in Platonic philosophy, the “world soul” or “Son of God,” as Justin styles it, is impressed upon a cross in the vault of heaven, representing the sun crossing over the ecliptic.

Ixion in Cruciform

Platonic symbolism seems to be expressed in portrayals of the myth of Ἰξίων or Ixion, the king of legendary Thessalian people called the Lapiths, centuries before the common era. For murdering his father-in-law and making indecencies about Zeus’s wife, Hera, Ixion’s punishment is crucifixion by the father god, who fastens the king to a wheel, in cross shape, for all eternity in Hades.

Ixion thus is depicted in cruciform, affixed to a turning wheel in the shape of an X. This X-shaped cruciform itself has been adopted as symbolizing Christianity, in the chi-rho ✠ symbol and in abbreviations such as “Xtianity” and “Xn,” and so on.

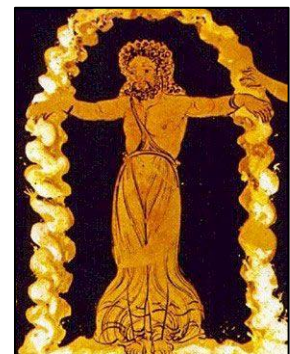


The image of Ixion above right is from a Greek vase, predating the common era by two to four centuries, while depictions of the cruciform god on other pottery date to at least 500 BCE.⁵⁸

Prometheus Crucified

Centuries before the common era, the Titan Prometheus was portrayed as crucified, as in the image to the right, which depicts the god as punished using chains, on a red figure vase dating to around 350 BCE.⁵⁹

In his parody of Prometheus’s punishment, the poet Lucian of Samosata (c. 125-c. 180 AD/CE) “uses all the technical terms of a crucifixion: Prometheus is to be nailed to two rocks above a ravine in the sight of all, in such a way as to produce the effect of ‘a most serviceable cross’...”⁶⁰



Prometheus chained
(Berlin State Museums)

⁵⁶ The Greek word used by Plato is ἀνασχινδουλευθήσεται, related to ἀνασκολοπιζω, which means “to fix on a pole or stake, impale.” Per *Liddell & Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, ἀνασκολοπιζω “is used convertibly with ἀνασταυρόω.”

⁵⁷ Isaiah 53 describes a typical scapegoat ritual of a righteous man carrying the griefs, sorrows and inequities of others, for which transgressions he is wounded and so on. This passage is considered to have “prefigured” Christ’s passion; however, it is evident that the OT scriptures existed first and were used to create the gospel story.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., cup 5728 in the Museum of Art and History in Geneva, Switzerland.

⁵⁹ See www.theoi.com/Gallery/T21.4.html for the Prometheus image.

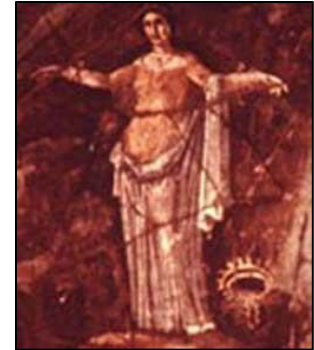
⁶⁰ Hengel, 12. Although Lucian wrote during the second century AD/CE, his work has not been demonstrated clearly to have been influenced by Christianity, which did not have significant presence even by his time. Lucian’s play is based significantly on much older sources, such as Hesiod’s *Theogony*

Lucian's latter description in the original Greek employs the word σταυρός *stauros*, again, the same term used in the New Testament to depict Jesus's stake/cross.

Andromeda Chained

Andromeda was the daughter of the mythical Ethiopian queen Cassiopeia, as well as the wife of the Greek hero Perseus. In the myth, when her mother bragged about her beauty, the sea god Poseidon crucified Andromeda with chains on a rock, like Prometheus.

The image on the right is from Pompeii, prior to 79 AD/CE,⁶¹ centuries before Christ was depicted likewise. Moreover, Andromeda's story of persecution was conveyed by Greek playwright Euripides (c. 480-406 BCE), several centuries before the common era. In the myth, Andromeda becomes the constellation of the same name, thus displaying the astral or astrotheological nature of the story.



Julius's Funeral

As part of this ancient tradition of cruciforms, according to ancient sources, at Julius Caesar's funeral was displayed an articulated wax effigy of the statesman that "closely resembled the 'crucified figure' in the *Orpheos Bakkikos* engraving" and that was "affixed to a cruciform *tropaeum* ['trophy'] and shown to the people."⁶²

Julius's funerary celebration was "staged" dramatically by Roman politician and general Marc Antony (83-30 BCE):

Caesar's funeral, at which Mark Antony gave his famous funerary oration, took place on 17 March 44 BCE, on the third day after his assassination. Since Caesar's body was laid out flat on his bier on the Rostra and could not be seen by the attending people, a realistic wax figure was raised above the bier. It displayed all the dagger wounds, particularly the fatal wound to his side, and was fastened to a cruciform *tropaeum*, which also carried Caesar's blood-stained robe. By means of a mechanism the *tropaeum* was rotated around its vertical axis, so that the entire crowd on the Forum Romanum could see how savagely the murderers had slaughtered him. The people revolted, cremated Caesar's body on the Forum and hunted for the assassins and conspirators. This was celebrated as his resurrection, as his victory over death.⁶³

Famed for his affair with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, Antony was another "New Dionysus,"⁶⁴ as well as the first bishop of the cult of the god Divus Julius, the deified Caesar.⁶⁵ According to

(521f) and Aeschylus's *Prometheus* (52ff). Other elements, including Prometheus being "nailed," can be found in Apollodorus (1.7.1). (Hengel, 11)

⁶¹ uwm.edu/Course/mythology/0800/underworld.htm

⁶² Carotta, 1. Appian (*Civil Wars* 2.20.147): "...someone raised above the bier an image of Caesar himself, wrought of wax.... The image was turned around and around by a mechanical device, showing the twenty-three wounds on all parts of the body and the fact..." Other sources include Suetonius, Plutarch and Nicholas of Damascus.

⁶³ Carotta, 16.

⁶⁴ Otto, 83, 110.

⁶⁵ Del Mar, 308.

the Greco-Roman historian Appian (c. 95-c. 165 AD/CE), at the funeral Antony held that Caesar was now “sacred and inviolable” and that “everybody was to be held sacred and inviolate who should find refuge in him,”⁶⁶ a rather Christian-sounding concept, purportedly predating Christ’s alleged advent by over four decades.

The *Tropaeum*

The discussion of Julius’s *tropaeum* ranks as important to Christ-myth studies, including and especially the subject of crucifixes and cruciforms. The Latin word *tropaeum* means: “a trophy, monument of victory.” It can also mean “any memorial.”⁶⁷

As for the word’s usage in antiquity, Cicero employed some form of [tropaeum](#) numerous times, while other writers utilizing the term include Apuleius, Seneca, Suetonius, Tacitus and Vergil. Obviously, the cruciform trophies were well known, and their similarity to the Christian cross was quite noticeable to Justin, Tertullian and Minucius.



Roman *tropaeum*
(Limes Museum,
Aalen, Germany)

The image to the right is a miniature *tropaeum* pictured in Carotta and cited as part of the “Collection of Classical Antiquities, Berlin.”⁶⁸ As we can see, this cruciform trophy of a breastplate essentially constitutes a “man on a cross.” Note also the bent knees, resembling a typical crucifixion posture, as found also in the Orpheos ornament.



The image on the left is of a Roman trophy/*tropaeum* from the second or third century AD/CE. Again, we can see that it resembles a crucifix or cruciform, an object, therefore, that would be familiar to the minds of Roman citizens, as a triumphal sign. This fact raises questions about the claim of Roman emperor Constantine’s alleged “conversion” in the fourth century, after he purportedly saw the sign of the cross representing victory—*In hoc signo vinces*—since the symbol already held this meaning, long before Christ was portrayed upon it.

The crucifix thus is not necessarily representative of a person being killed, but serves as a useful device, such as the victory trophies or *tropaea*, which also originally symbolized “a tree hung with spoils.”⁶⁹ In the *tropaeum* we possess a precedent of the Christian cross, both of which icons in turn could be related to the Orpheos gem.

Tertullian

Tropaea also are meant by the reference to cruciform “trophies” in Tertullian’s *Apology* (16), in speaking to the Romans:

We have shown before that your deities are derived from shapes modelled from the cross.
But you also worship victories, for in your **trophies** the cross is the heart of the **trophy**.

⁶⁶ Davis, 2.155.

⁶⁷ *Cassell's Latin-English Dictionary*, 228.

⁶⁸ Carotta, 18.

⁶⁹ “*Tropaeum*,” perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tropaeum&la=la

The camp religion of the Romans is all through a worship of the standards, a setting the standards above all gods. Well, as those images decking out the standards are ornaments of crosses. All those hangings of your standards and banners are robes of crosses.⁷⁰

The Latin text of Tertullian's *Apologeticum* (16.6-8) is:

*Diximus originem deorum vestrorum a plastis de cruce induci. Sed et victorias adoratis, cum in **tropaeis** cruces intestina sint **tropaeorum**. Religio Romanorum tota castrensis signa veneratur, signa iurat, signa omnibus deis praeponit. Omnes illi imaginum suggestus in signis monilia crucum sunt; siphara illa vexillorum et cantabrorum stolae crucum sunt.*

Note the Roman Church father uses a form of the word *tropaeum* twice here (bolded).

As another example of a pagan trophy with a cross at its heart, an ancient carving depicts the birth of Dionysus attended by a number of figures, including a man holding a large cross or, possibly, *tropaeum*, appearing on a sarcophagus dating from possibly the second century AD/CE.⁷¹



Minucius

Minucius Felix uses the word *tropaeum* in his *Octavius* (20.6-7), in which he denies Christian reverence of the cross and asserts that, on the contrary, it is the Romans who adore the sacred object:

Crosses, moreover, we neither worship nor wish for. You, indeed, who consecrate gods of wood, adore wooden crosses perhaps as parts of your gods. For your very standards, as well as your banners; and flags of your camp, what else are they but crosses gilded and adorned? Your victorious **trophies** not only imitate the appearance of a simple cross, but also that of a man affixed to it.⁷²

The original Latin is:

*Cruces etiam nec colimus nec optamus. vos plane, qui ligneos deos consecratis, cruces ligneas ut deorum vestrorum partes forsitan adoratis. Nam et signa ipsa et cantabra et vexilla castrorum quid aliud quam inauratae cruces sunt et ornatae? **Tropaea** vestra victricia non tantum simplicis crucis faciem, verum et adfixi hominis imitantur.*

To reiterate, as do other Church fathers, Minucius (*Oct.* 29.7) describes the sign of the cross as made by any “pure-minded” worshipper with his arms outstretched, as in the posture of Moses in his defeat of the Amalekites.

⁷⁰ Roberts (1903), 3.31.

⁷¹ Freke and Gandy, 52. In private correspondence with the author, Carotta notes: “The interpretation as a tropaeum or cross of that object appearing in the birth of Dionysos on a sarcophagus is not accepted by important archaeologists, e.g. Erika Simon.”

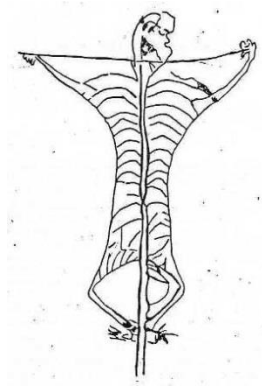
⁷² Roberts (1880), 13.500.

The Pozzuoli and Other Crucifixes

The image on the right of the crudely inscribed Roman graffito found at Pozzuoli, Italy, represents a human in cruciform and dates to possibly the first century AD/CE. Because Christian tradition assumes the gospel story to have taken place in the first century, this graffito has been presumed to be Christian. However, the evidence indicates the gospel story does not represent “history” that occurred during the first century and that the Christian effort occurred largely during the second century.⁷³

Moreover, this graffito bears no mark of symbolizing Jesus or Christianity. On the contrary, it could be a crude *tropaeum*, particularly in consideration of its placement near an amphitheater, where gladiators fought and could have inscribed such victorious symbols.

From the clothing and supposed long hair, the figure has been surmised to be a woman; however, the rendering simply may include the gladiator's armor, as in the *tropaeum*, or it could be an animal skin, such as described by the Roman historian Tacitus concerning condemned criminals.⁷⁴ In any event, it ranks as unscientific to insist that all crucifixes or cruciforms from antiquity are Christian.



Line drawing of Pozzuoli
graffito
(Gino Zaninotto)

Gaza

The *tropaeum* shape appears to be imitated in one of the earliest known “Christian” crucifixes, on the magical amulet from Gaza or Syria-Palestina (right), which may be as early as the second century. If this ornament were from that time, it would serve as evidence of the syncretized nature of the Christ figure at this early date. Although it identifies “Son,” “Father” and “Jesus Christ,” the inscription on this amulet is evidently Gnostic, including the Egyptian-influenced, mystical words *Badetophoth*, *Satraperkmephthe* and others.⁷⁵

Moreover, the inscription's word “Christe,” from “Christos,” as opposed to “Chrēste” from “Chrēstos,” may indicate a later date, possibly the fourth century or afterward, when “Christos” comes into increased currency.⁷⁶ (Note the erect phallus in this image,



Magical amulet from Gaza
(British Museum)

⁷³ See my books *The Christ Conspiracy*, *Suns of God*, *Christ in Egypt* and *Who Was Jesus?*

⁷⁴ Tacitus, *Annales*, 15.44, 2.13.1.

⁷⁵ Sheckler and Leith: “The amulet...is also inscribed with a multitude of occult names: not only ‘Son, Father, Jesus Christ,’ but also the Egyptian derived *Badetophoth* and *Satraperkmephthe*, among others. The catalog entry concedes that the amulet could reflect the activity of a pagan magician who, like the family of Jewish exorcists in Acts 19:13-17, included Jesus' name in his repertory of magical powers.... The amulet might equally come from a Jewish or—given the period's fluid religious boundaries—Jewish-Christian occult practitioner.”

⁷⁶ The earliest extant Greek NT manuscripts use the words *Chrēstos* and *Chrēstians*. In his famous passage held up as “evidence” of Jesus of Nazareth, Latin writer Suetonius originally wrote about *Chrestus*, not *Christus*. See my *Chrēstos* articles, including “Is Suetonius's Chresto a Reference to Jesus?”

reminiscent of Priapic symbolism. One writer comments that “phalli—that is, erect penises—were considered to be apotropaic in antiquity.”⁷⁷)

Chrestos

Purportedly from the fourth century AD/CE, the crucifix image on the right from the Eastern Roman Empire portrays not “Christ” but “Chrest,” with the letter epsilon in the original Greek. The figure strangely labeled ΕΗΣΟ ΧΡΕΣΤΟΣ or ΕΕΣΟ CHRESTOS is not tormented on a cross but is in cruciform, surrounded by 12 humans, surmised to be the Christian apostles.



Our earliest extant biblical manuscripts, such as the Codex Sinaiticus, identify the hero of the gospel story as Χρηστός *Chrēstos*, meaning “Good,” and not Χριστός *Christos*, denoting “anointed,” while his followers are Chrēstians, not Christians. Because of this fact, we would surmise that this gemstone may be earlier than the fourth century, based on Chrestos, which is spelled oddly with an epsilon (ε) and not an eta (η).

It is possible that Chrest’s companions symbolize the 12 signs of the zodiac, which some Gnostics identified the Christian apostles as representing.⁷⁸ In this regard, this possible brooch would not be a strictly “Christian” artifact and would constitute not a depiction of a “historical” crucifixion but, rather, a symbolic and allegorical representation of a very ancient, mythical archetype.

Trophy Coin

The crosslike trophy imagery and its relationship to Christianity is apparent also from a coin commemorating Julius Caesar’s victory during the Gallic Wars over the Gaulish chieftain/king Vercingetorix (c. 82-46 BCE).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ed-M, “The Romans NEVER CRUCIFIED...” The term “apotropaic” means “warding off evil.”

⁷⁸ As I write in *Christ in Egypt* (262), in his *Against Heresies* (2.21), Church father Irenaeus objects to the Gnostic notion that the 12 apostles symbolized the “aeons,” which have been asserted to represent the zodiacal signs. (See Legge, 2.152.) Apparently, this association occurred fairly early in Christian history, as Church father Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 211) wrote in his work *Excerpta ex Theodota* (1.25.2) that, according to the Valentinian Gnostics, “the apostles replaced the signs of the zodiac, for as birth is governed by them, so rebirth is directed by the apostles.” (Grant, 62)

⁷⁹ Carotta, 18. After his defeat in 52, Vercingetorix served five years’ imprisonment before being paraded through Rome and then executed in 46-45 BCE. Carotta cites this coin image as coming from “Syd 1014; Craw 468.1; RSC 13.”



In the coin above left, we see Julius's cruciform *tropaeum* in the middle, with the vanquished chieftain on the right and a female "weeping Gallia" on the left, symbolizing the defeated confederacy of tribes or "nation" by that name. This scene resembles that of the weeping Marys at the feet of the crucified Jesus; the goddesses Isis and Nephthys (the "Merti")⁸⁰ surrounding Osiris as the Egyptian ankh or "cross of life"; and Odin hanging on or as the Yggdrasil tree amid the Norns.

Triad Imagery

In the Vercingetorix coin, we have a symbol for a man—in the case of Caesar, a *divinity*—on a cross between two adversarial figures, resembling not only Christ's crucifixion between two malefactors but also a number of other such motifs.

In this regard, the Orpheus gem features two conical shapes at its base (right), as noted, completing a trinity or triad as in the Vercingetorix coin.



Carotta surmises that these cones represent parts of the rotation device used to turn the Julius effigy for the crowd at his funeral.⁸¹ As is often the case with symbolism, it may be that these cone-like elements possess more than one meaning, possibly representing the duos or "twins" of the traditional triad/trinity imagery of antiquity.



Indeed, other *tropaea* provide archetypal symbolism that would leave a similar impression on the mind. The line drawing to the right is similar to the *tropaeum* erected by Emperor Trajan after his Dacian victory in 113 AD/CE (left), with a pile of shields and helmets of his defeated enemies at the cruciform's feet.



⁸⁰ Budge, 1.429, 1.431.

⁸¹ Carotta, 20.

A coin minted during the reign of Octavian/Augustus has a *tropaeum* between inanimate objects at the base (right), similar to the Orpheus amulet.

Presumably there were many more such artifacts throughout the Roman Empire, creating a pre-Christian, triumphal cross-filled milieu generally unaccounted for when exploring the origins of Christianity.



Primitive Dionysus?

The triad symbolism with a cruciform figure in the middle predates Christianity by centuries, can be found in several cultures, and is not reflective of a “historical” event.

Another example with a cruciform figure in the middle comes from ancient Crete, many centuries before the common era: At right appears a Minoan seal from Kydonia that depicts the “lord of the wild beasts”⁸² and is dated to around 1700 BCE.⁸³



Surmising this portrayal to represent the “Cretan Dionysos,” classical scholar Dr. Carl Kerényi relates:

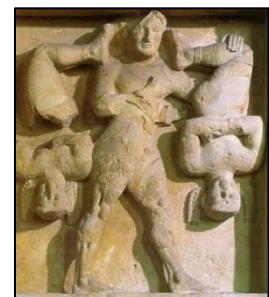
This type of figure was later provided with wings and as “Oriental Dionysos” was taken from the Near East into Hellenistic art. This fact and the Greek name of a similar deity, “Zagreus,” who was connected with the Orphic myth of Dionysos, make it seem highly probable that on the Kydonia seal we have a representation of the Cretan Dionysos.⁸⁴

Kerényi describes the scene as depicting the god taking hold of and controlling two lions, “living beasts of prey,”⁸⁵ a theme that resembles the story of Dionysos in a chariot drawn by lions, as well as the myth of the Greek son of God Hercules/Herakles’s defeat of the Nemean lion.

Herakles

There exist many other such trio examples, both as trinities of divine beings and as a god or hero surrounded by two entities of some sort, at times said to be “criminals,” “thieves” or “malefactors.”⁸⁶ In the pre-Classical Greek world, for example, Herakles was portrayed also as holding the hanging bodies of two criminals called Kerkopes, nearly six centuries before the common era.⁸⁷

To the right is a stone carving of Herakles with the Kerkopes, circa 560-550 BCE, from the Temple of Apollo/C at Selinus, Italy, now in the National Archeological Museum of Palermo.



⁸² Kerényi, 81, pl. 25.

⁸³ Rykwert, 139.

⁸⁴ Kerényi, 81.

⁸⁵ Kerényi, 81.

⁸⁶ See the section “The Two Thieves?” in my book *Christ in Egypt*, 357ff.

⁸⁷ See post by forum member “GodAlmighty” at freethoughtnation.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=24917#p24917

Buddha

As I relate in my review of Dr. Michael C. Lockwood's *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity*, the Indian godman Buddha is portrayed as situated between the two subordinated Hindu gods Brahma and Indra. These two deities, we learn from Lockwood, are depicted as representing the two ways in which Buddha is tempted by the demon Mara. Hence, they are comparable to the two malefactors in Christian tradition.⁸⁸

At the right is one of the earliest known images of Buddha, between the two demoted Hindu gods (c. 200-100 BCE)⁸⁹



Mithra

From the first century AD/CE, long before there were portrayals of Christ between two figures, a mosaic (right) depicts the Perso-Roman god Mithra between two "torchbearers," one of many such artifacts.

The torchbearer pointing up represents heaven and the spring equinox, the coming of the "heavenly" months, while the down-pointer symbolizes hell and the fall equinox, leading to the "hellishness" of winter. Here, Mithra symbolizes the sun.

Below left is a mosaic with all three figures, Mithra in the middle and two symbols connoting the torchbearers or cautopates. On the right, similar symbolism represents Mithra alone in an anthropomorphized form, holding a dagger and torch, from Basilica of San Clemente at Rome.



⁸⁸ Lockwood, 169. See also Lockwood, 102, 160.

⁸⁹ Huntington, 5.

The style in the Mithraic image above right is similar to one of the earliest images of Jesus “crucified” between the two “thieves” (c. 430 AD/CE), from a door on the Santa Sabina church in Rome:



In the early crucifixion scene above, Christ is simply in cruciform or cross shape, not appearing as if he is hanging on a cross, suffering, with knees bent and arms drawn upwards, as in later imagery.

From Cruciform to Dramatic Death

Illustrating this artistic development, Carotta provides images of four crucifixes side by side, from earliest to latest:



Fig. 16: Crucifix by Saint Francis of Assisi (San Damiano, Assisi, Italy, 12th century).

Figs. 17–19: Crucifixion on paintings by Giotto (14th cent.), Rembrandt and Rubens (17th cent.).

The Italian scholar next states:

This artistic historical progression signifies a falling motion. From the historical development of iconography it appears that the crucifix was only gradually understood as the representation of a factually crucified man, eventually leading to a more realistic personification and depiction of the Crucifixion: In the course of at least a thousand years Christ was at first occasionally supported by a footrest and a few centuries later allowed

to slowly sink down, so that the knees bent further while the body sagged, the arms stretched into a V-shape, and the head moved lower and lower (Christus patiens).⁹⁰

To summarize, the cruciform imagery started out as a pagan motif and was adopted into Christianity, in a fictional account of the crucifixion of the Jewish son of God by the Romans. Such a commonly revered motif would be vitally important to coopt into a proselytizing religion designed to usurp and dominate all others; hence, the gospel story and Christian tradition.

In the Orpheus icon, the figure is not sagging beneath the cross-bar, as would be the posture of a real person who was crucified. This image is attached to a cross, posed in cruciform, but does not record a historical crucifixion of a human being. The point cannot be emphasized enough that the "god on a cross" or cruciform existed long before the alleged time of Jesus Christ, whose purportedly historical crucifixion would reflect in reality a historicized account of the pre-existing mythical or symbolic motif.

Human Sacrifice

The portrayals of gods or humans on crosses or in cross shape thus constituted a fairly common occurrence, used even in the deifying funeral ceremonies of caesars, for example. The cruciform figure is not necessarily a crucified person. However, because humans were sacrificed often by hanging on a tree, this crucial theme would also represent human sacrifice, as in the gospel story.

Prior to Christ's purported crucifixion, Strabo wrote that, among the Albanians, human-sacrifice victims were "bonded with sacred fetters," anointed and stabbed in the side.⁹¹ In the last decade before the common era, Diodorus also related (5.31.2-5) that the Gauls "kill a man by a knife-stab in the region above the midriff, and after his fall they foretell the future by the convulsions of his limbs and the pouring of his blood..."⁹² In actuality, human sacrifice was common in many places in antiquity, and it is this popular rite we find in the gospel story, a propitiatory passion designed to remove sins, as in the typical scapegoat ritual.

The Cult of Julius

As previously noted, at his funeral with a *tropaeum* and articulated mannequin, Julius Caesar's stab wounds purportedly also were displayed, much like the portrayal of Christ after he suffered his passion, which included stab and other wounds.

⁹⁰ Carotta, 10.

⁹¹ In his *Geography* (11.4.7), Strabo remarks: "As for gods, they honour Helius, Zeus, and Selenê, but especially Selenê; her temple is near Iberia. The office of priest is held by the man who, after the king, is held in highest honour; he has charge of the sacred land, which is extensive and well-populated, and also of the temple slaves, many of whom are subject to religious frenzy and utter prophecies. And any one of those who, becoming violently possessed, wanders alone in the forests, is by the priest arrested, bound with sacred fetters, and sumptuously maintained during that year, and then led forth to the sacrifice that is performed in honour of the goddess, and, being anointed, is sacrificed along with other victims. The sacrifice is performed as follows: Some person holding a sacred lance, with which it is the custom to sacrifice human victims, comes forward out of the crowd and strikes the victim through the side into the heart, he being not without experience in such a task; and when the victim falls, they draw auguries from his fall and declare them before the public; and when the body is carried to a certain place, they all trample upon it, thus using it as a means of purification." (Strabo/Jones, 5.229)

⁹² Kendrick, 82. The relevant Greek in Diodorus is: ...ἄνθρωπον γὰρ κατασπείσαντες τύπτουσι μαχαίρᾳ κατὰ τὸν ὑπὲρ τὸ διάφραγμα τόπον, καὶ πεσόντος τοῦ πληγέντος ἐκ τῆς πτώσεως καὶ τοῦ σπαραγμοῦ τῶν μελῶν, ἔτι δὲ τῆς τοῦ αἵματος ῥύσεως τὸ μέλλον νοοῦσι...

The fact that there was a Julian cult, the first bishop of which was Marc Anthony, and which became more or less widespread, serves as evidence that the Roman statesman was not considered a villain after his murder, which ostensibly was committed because he was guilty of dangerous and tyrannical policies. Indeed, after his death, Julius was worshipped as God the Father,⁹³ and his demise signaled the start of a "messianic" religion that included Augustus as the "son of God," as in the Priene Inscription.⁹⁴ The month of July was named for Julius, as a god.⁹⁵

Demonstrating the importance of the Julian cult, official oaths were "formulated in the name of Julius Caesar, and to violate them was deemed a more heinous crime and punished with greater severity than any other perjury."⁹⁶

With such an unprecedented situation, it is plausible that Caesar's assassination was viewed as a ritual murder, not unlike that of Dionysus or his critics Pentheus and Lycurgus. In this context of raising him up to divine honors after his slaughter, with an effigy of his body on a cross with the wounds showing, one might wonder if there was not an element of human sacrifice in his assassination.

How else can we explain why Julius rose to the status of deity, protected and ensured by harsh laws, if he were merely a hated criminal and tyrant?

The Julian cult at its height included numerous altars, shrines and temple sites around the Roman Empire.⁹⁷ These sanctuaries eventually were destroyed by Augustus, who massacred some 300 politicians and military men on the Ides of March,⁹⁸ a day of many religious observations.

Ides of March

The fact that Caesar's assassination was committed by a number of individuals on the Ides of March, again a popular time for sacred festivities, serves as further indication of a sacred ritual. In this same regard, speaking of the ancient Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE-17/18 AD/CE), the article "Religion in ancient Rome" states:

In his *Fasti*, a long-form poem covering Roman holidays from January to June, Ovid presents a unique look at Roman antiquarian lore, popular customs, and religious practice...[of] such venerable festivals as the Saturnalia, Consualia, and feast of Anna Perenna on the Ides of March, where Ovid treats the assassination of the newly deified Julius Caesar as utterly incidental to the festivities among the Roman people.⁹⁹

⁹³ Del Mar, 307.

⁹⁴ The Priene inscription concerns Julius's grandnephew Caesar Augustus (63 BCE-14 AD/CE), containing a text in which Rome's first emperor and divine son of God is declared a savior whose birth signals the arrival of "good news" (*evangelia*), using the precise term found in the later gospel story: "Whereas Providence...has...adorned our lives with the highest good: Augustus...and has in her beneficence granted us and those who will come after us [a Savior] who has made war to cease and who shall put everything in [peaceful] order...with the result that the birthday of our God signalled the beginning of Good News for the world because of him... therefore..."

⁹⁵ Del Mar, 308.

⁹⁶ Del Mar, 308.

⁹⁷ Del Mar, 308.

⁹⁸ Del Mar, 308.

⁹⁹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome

Liberalia Celebration

While his assassination occurred on a day renowned for religious celebrations, Caesar's funeral was held on the first day of the Dionysian spring festival of Liberalia, around March 17th, possibly also reflecting a deliberately chosen date as part of a sacred-king ritual. Carotta likens the observation to a "Dionysian tragedy":

It was also at Rome, where after Caesar's assassination his funeral on the day of the *Liberalia*...became a historical iteration of the Dionysian tragedy, and where a circle of prominent poets—among them Virgil, Horace, Catullus and Tibullus—ranked among the *Cultores Liberi*, the worshippers of Bacchus.¹⁰⁰

Here we see a comparison between Bacchus and the "New Dionysus," as well as the fact that later famed poets were Bacchic devotees.

Carotta describes the importance of Liberalia and the Julian cult:

Orpheus...was not only the good shepherd but also the hero who had returned Eurydice from Hades. On the day of the Liberalia, Julius Caesar had been his own Bacchic Orpheus, because he had returned himself from the underworld, as he had once already done with his uncle Gaius Marius. His *resurrectio* as Divus Iulius on the Liberalia was however effectuated by Mark Antony's dramatic staging, who was not only consul, but also the designated *flamen Divi Iulii*, high priest of the deified Caesar. Antony had commemorated Caesar's historical Easter and led him to political and divine resurrection from death by raising his bloodstained wax effigy on a *tropaeum*: Caesar's *erectio crucis*. So, as the celebrant, Antony was the actual Bacchic Orpheus.¹⁰¹

If Julius's funeral was intended to herald his resurrection, here we have a three-day period of mourning between the death and revivification, the same as many ancient solar-fertility figures such as Adonis, Attis and Jesus.

Phallic Symbols and Priapus

Dionysus's Liberalia occurred at the vernal equinox or spring, a time of celebrating the fertility cult, and Carotta suggests a phallic meaning for the knobby ends of the cross upon which Orpheus is placed.¹⁰² Knowing how popular has been the phallic cult, as exemplified by the fertility god Priapus during the era in question, we would not be surprised if lingam elements were included in this Orphic mysteries portraiture.

In antiquity, the priapic phallus was considered a tool for punishment, evidently a sort of "scarecrow" crucifixion or impalement. In this regard, Priapus "punished thieves with his 'bloody-looking pole' or *palus obscenus*."¹⁰³ This object of torture also has been labeled the "phallus-crux." Images of Priapus were placed in conspicuous areas to threaten rape and sodomy as punishment for theft, trespassing and other crimes.¹⁰⁴ (Recall also the Gaza crucifix in which Christ is depicted with an erect phallus.)

¹⁰⁰ Carotta, 15.

¹⁰¹ Carotta, 21.

¹⁰² Carotta, 21.

¹⁰³ Ed-M. "The Romans NEVER CRUCIFIED the Way We Think They Did!"

¹⁰⁴ "Priapus." en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priapus

Both god and animal serving as part of the Dionysian procession, one of the animals sacred to Priapus was the ass,¹⁰⁵ and it is surmised that the infamous Alexamenos crucifix (above right) is reflective not of Christianity but of the Priapic cultus. Other alternatives are the Egyptian gods Anubis and Set. In any event, the graffito is not proved to be Christian and could represent a *tropaeum*.

The fact that Caesar's murder and funeral took place at the vernal equinox or spring, the time of the dying and rising solar-fertility gods, also ranks as significant, as it follows this pre-Christian archetypal death and resurrection motif later exemplified in the fictional gospel story.

If Julius's murder was not considered part of a sacred ritual in emulation of the Bacchic passion, with the promise of immortality and deification by the Eleusinian mysteries, we are hard-pressed to explain why dozens of senators would be so hateful of Caesar as to assassinate him viciously and then pay for a state funeral in which he was honored as an immortal god. This situation represents more or less classic sacred-king, ritual-sacrifice behavior and doctrine.



Line drawing of a graffito
Caption: 'Alexamenos worships God'

Meaning of Bakkikos

In a similar vein, Carotta explains the Bakkikos inscription as designating one variation of the Orpheos myth, which includes the legendary mystic's own gruesome sacrifice:

...the artefact would be syncretistic or Orphic, however, with an Orpheus subjected to Dionysian suffering like Marsyas at the stake, and not like the Apollonian Orpheus with his lyre amidst tamed beasts. Bakkikos as an epithet of Orpheos is not tautologic, because beside the tradition that (as it seems to be the case here) Orpheus was killed by the enemies of his own following, there was among many others one famous variant, in which Orpheus, after returning from the Hades, abandoned his earlier habit of worshipping Dionysus-Bacchus and turned to Helios-Apollo instead, for which the insulted god had him dismembered by his Maenads. Therefore the designation Bakkikos would contrast this Orpheus on the cross from the follower of Apollo and identify him as the founder of the Dionysian Mysteries (see below).¹⁰⁶

Hence, we discover there are different depictions of Orpheus, one who was "subjected to Dionysian suffering like Marsyas at the stake" and another who was a devotee of the sun god Apollo. The Bakkikos inscriptions denote Orpheos as a worshipper of Dionysus, therefore.

Dionysian Suffering?

What is "Dionysian suffering?" To reiterate, the legendary Orpheus was the main proselytizer for Dionysus in a popular, well-connected and wealthy religious sect that traveled around the Mediterranean, putting on "passion plays," such as that of Euripides. Like the god himself, the acolyte was torn apart, in this case because he changed his allegiance to a different deity. Thus,

¹⁰⁵ Gordon, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Carotta, 4.

his “Dionysian suffering” is a form of persecution for his faith, much like the purported Christian martyrdom of the first centuries of Christian history.

Marsyas at the Stake

Who is “Marsyas at the stake?” The word “stake” denotes the Greek term σταυρός *stauros*, again the very instrument upon which Christ was said to be “crucified.” Hence, one could refer to “Christ at the stake.”

Marsyas is a figure from Greek myth, the grandson of Hercules, who in turn was the son of Zeus. Hence, Marsyas is the great grandson of God or *Dios*, as, again is the genitive/possessive form of “Zeus.”

Marsyas was invoked often in life lessons in which hubris played a role, connoting the disrespectful challenging of the gods and megalomania that places one equal to or higher than them. For his hubris in dealing with the deities Athena and Apollo, in different myths, Marsyas was killed.

In the contest with Apollo, “Marsyas naturally lost and was flayed alive in a cave near Celaenae for his hubris to challenge a god. Apollo then nailed Marsyas’ skin to a pine tree...”¹⁰⁷ Here we learn that Marsyas—a nature demigod, evidently representing the reeds from which flutes are made—was flayed, with his skin nailed to a pine tree, much like the solar-foliage god Attis “crucified” on a pine tree.¹⁰⁸ Again, Christ too is depicted in Acts (5:30) as “hung on a tree.”

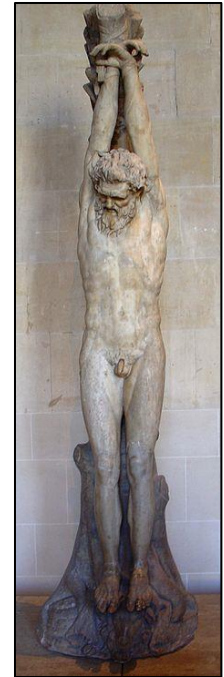
Referring to a cross found at the Italian city of Herculaneum, destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD/CE, Temple University Classics professor Dr. Walter O. Moeller comments:

...The cross from Herculaneum should be restudied as a possible pagan symbol.... One fact has been generally overlooked when discussing this cross; the theme of a god or a demi-god hanged on a cross or a Lebensbaum [Tree of Life] was not at all strange to the pagan world: Marsyas, Lycurgus, the Bacchic Orpheus, Seth and Wotan.¹⁰⁹



As this credentialed expert remarks, reminding the reader as well that the cross is an old solar symbol, this Herculaneum artifact need not be Christian at all. In fact, there could have been a tropaeum embedded in this alcove, producing this image after it was removed, possibly when the inhabitants fled the erupting volcano.

In any event, here we have the theme of suffering, hanging from a tree and crucifixion in the Dionysian mythos, in which Dionysus himself is said to be hung from a tree.¹¹⁰



Torment of Marsyas
(Louvre Museum;
Photo: Pvasiliadis)

¹⁰⁷ “Marsyas,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsyas

¹⁰⁸ See my article, “Attis: Born of a Virgin on December 25th, Crucified and Resurrected after Three Days.”

¹⁰⁹ Moeller, 12. See, e.g., Maiuri’s *La croce di Ercolano (The Herculaneum Cross)*.

¹¹⁰ Carotta, 4; Acharya (2004), 102.

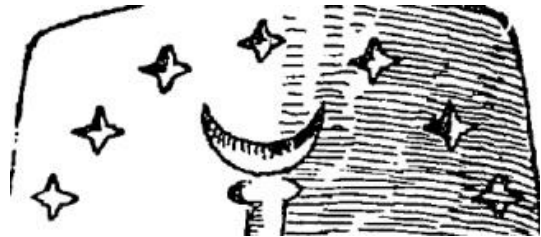
The Kings of Ai

One is reminded too of the hanging of kings in the Bible, such as at Ai, where five royals were sacrificed, essentially as an offering to the Jewish tribal warrior and sun god Yahweh.¹¹¹ (Joshua 10) Amid all the rest of the gore in the (mythical) conquest of Canaan, we read at Joshua 8:29 the disturbing tale of the Israelite hero Joshua “hanging the king on a tree” or impaling him on a pole: “He impaled the body of the king of Ai on a pole and left it there until evening.”

The Greek of the OT/Septuagint renders the Hebrew as καὶ τὸν βασιλέα τῆς Γαι ἐκρέμασεν ἐπὶ ξύλου, the relevant word *ekremasen* meaning “hung” or “suspended,” on the *xylon*, denoting “wood” or “tree.” This same phraseology appears in the New Testament as concerns Christ’s crucifixion, at Acts 5:30: κρεμάσαντες ἐπὶ ξύλου *kremansantes epi xylou* or “hanging upon wood/tree.” (For more information on human sacrifice, see my book *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*.)

The Moon and Stars

Based on its crucifixion scene, there is little reason to suggest that the Orpheos artifact is fake or founded upon Christianity, as it could represent ancient iconography and possess ritual significance in existence long before the common era. Further evidence of the object’s authenticity comes from the seven stars and a crescent moon at its top. Ignoring the inscription, Christians have wanted to see in this image Christ during the eclipse that allegedly accompanied his death, according to the gospel tale. (Mt 27) In reality, there simply exists no scientific evidence of such an event occurring in history at the time.¹¹²



The seven stars may represent the days of the week, which are the seven “planets,” who in turn are gods and goddesses. The Pleiades or “Seven Sisters,” as they were called in antiquity when all of them were visible, also have been suggested, as the “lyre of Orpheus.”¹¹³ Carotta speaks of the symbolism as representing “Holy Week.” There is precedent for this imagery in other artifacts; hence, this element serves as more evidence that the Orpheos gem is genuine and ancient, not the other way around.

Regarding a coin from the same era as Julius, Viklund says:

The seven stars and the crescent moon was a common motif especially among the Roman royals.... On one side is visible the glorious head belonging to the sun god Sol, and on the other the moon and stars. The coin [below] is from the year 76 BCE....¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ For the solar nature of Yahweh (and Jesus), see my ebook *Jesus as the Sun throughout History*.

¹¹² For an analysis of the value of the supposed account in Thallus, see my book *Who Was Jesus?* and the article by Jobjorn Boman, "Comments on Carrier: Is Thallus Actually Quoted by Eusebius?"

¹¹³ Carotta, 4.

¹¹⁴ Viklund, Roger. "ΟΡΦΕΟC BAKKIKOC. Part 5—the moon and stars." rogerviklund.wordpress.com: “De sju stjärnorna och månskärnan var ett vanligt motiv inte minst bland de romerska kungligheter... På den ena sidan syns det strålande huvudet tillhörande solguden Sol, och på den andra månen och stjärnorna. Myntet är från år 76 fvt och...”



As we can see, astral religion or astrotheology was front and center on the religious stage in the Mediterranean, as it was in many other places. There are other such artifacts with the crescent moon and stars.

Lunar Resurrection Symbol

Because of its waxing and waning, thus “dying” and being “reborn” each month, in antiquity the moon was a symbol of resurrection.¹¹⁵ Hence, in the Orpheus artifact we would have a depiction of a death, in the case of Julius Caesar, accompanied by an expected resurrection. Concerning the moon and stars on the amulet, Carotta remarks.

Accordingly, the crescent moon of Orpheos Bakkikos is not situated in the sky above the crucified figure, but on the peak of the cross, because it is not a representation of the real moon but a crucifixed [sic] replica of the moon, maybe of silver, a silent *titulus crucis*, the crescent shape of which already reveals something specific: The moon that in eternal cyclic recurrence first wanes—in other words: dies—and then waxes again—in other words: is reborn—was also regarded as the symbol of resurrection. Thus the secondary interpretation of the seven stars as planets...could make sense as well: Since the weekdays were named after the planets—well recognizable in Latin, whereas sun and moon were included—, the seven planets would then indicate a whole week. Together with the crescent moon they might symbolize the Holy Week—which of course concludes with the Resurrection, followed by the Ascension, because the seven stars were commonly understood to be the *septentriones*, the “seven threshing oxen” of the Cart constellation (Dipper), which trek around the Pole Star and never disappear beneath the horizon to take a bath in the Oceanus like other stars. In this region of the Northern sky Venus had her place, there she guided the soul of Divus Iulius, her murdered and deified son Julius Caesar, there the resurrected Caesar appeared as a bright comet, and there the souls of the blessed migrated, especially many departed members of the imperial dynasties—demonstrated for example for the deceased and deified juvenescent son of

¹¹⁵ Carotta, 12; Ratzinger (2000), 101.

emperor Domitian, Divus Caesar, on whose commemorative gold coin the seven stars are arranged in the same way as on the Orpheos Bakkikos stone (fig. 23).¹¹⁶

Here we see the common astrotheological motif as it may have been applicable to Julius, but it is possibly the moon and stars were included elsewhere to connote the same occurrence to other rulers on whose coins and other artifacts they appear.

Resurrection Coin

A portrayal of Julius's resurrection appears on an ancient coin, as in Carotta's paper (17):



Figs. 24a, b: Buca *denarius*. Caesar's resurrection, metaphorically depicted as the eternal sleep of Endymion, who is awakened every night by Selene's kiss. 44 BCE.

The coin is further described by Carotta:

A rendition of Caesar's funeral and resurrection can be found on a denarius that was minted the same year [44 BCE].... It metaphorically represents him as Endymion, the shepherd or king who was found sleeping in a cave by the moon goddess Selene. She fell in love with him and requested eternal life for him from Zeus. He chose eternal sleep, from which he would only awaken to receive Selene, who would descend to him every night. On the coin Endymion lies in the cave on a bed of furs, reclined to the rock, his head resting on his bent left arm. In this moment of awakening he seems to be sitting up from his sleep, while Selene is descending from her carriage. A winged figure is lighting the scene with the upright torch of immortality.¹¹⁷

Manipulating the image of Caesar as the reclining and rising Endymion, Carotta shows how similar it would be to the Orpheos artifact, missing only the cross,¹¹⁸ which is supplied by a *tropaeum*:

¹¹⁶ Carotta, 12.

¹¹⁷ Carotta, 16.

¹¹⁸ Carotta, 19.



Figs. 29a–c: Caesar-Endymion from the Buca *denarius*, clipped and attached to the tropaeum.

Hence, we can see that this type of pose fits into the proper era and speaks to the authenticity of the Orpheos gem as well.

Note that the “winged figure” of the Endymion myth at times is said to be Virgo the Virgin, while the “winged Dionysus” mentioned earlier also comes to mind. The discussion of a torch likewise reminds one of Mithraism, but, of course, torches would be important in many cults, such as those of fire and sun worshippers.

In this Julius-Endymion myth, the virgin angel bestows light and immortality upon the shepherd-king hero, as he is awakened from “eternal sleep” (death) by the waning moon, symbol of resurrection.

Aureus of Divus Caesar

As part of the evidence that the Orpheos gem is both ancient and non-Christian, representing a style correct for the time, Carotta also provides the following image:



On the left is the gold coin or aureus of Divus Caesar (82–84 AD/CE), with the inscription DIVVS CAESAR IMP[eratoris] DOMITIANI F[ilius]. On the right is the cast of the Orpheus stone, flipped horizontally to emulate the original.

The image on the left represents the deceased infant son of the emperor Domitian (fl. 81-96 AD/CE), in a posture indicating his taking place among the stars and previously deified emperors. The shared imagery of the seven stars and a celestial body, as well as the pose of the central figure, is noteworthy in both artifacts. The aureus figure requires only a cross or *tropaeum* to be very similar to the Orpheos artifact. Thus, again, the Orpheus amulet or ring-stone would fit into the appropriate time period.

Crucified and Resurrected Divine Savior

If we include in this analysis the fact that Julius Caesar was said to be born of the goddess Venus,¹¹⁹ in his deified, evermerized or apotheosized biography we possess a divine “son of God” (and God the Father) who on “Easter” was killed in an apparent sacred-king scapegoat ritual, depicted on a cross or in cruciform, with wounds, and resurrected, to ascend into heaven as a deity. This scenario, which resembles closely the basic gospel story, would have existed at least 44 years before the common era, when Julius died. Thus, Caesar is murdered, resurrects and ascends to heaven, several decades before Jesus supposedly lived.

Regarding the Orpheos gem and its possible relationship to Julius Caesar, Carotta comments:

Hence we recognize the Orpheos Bakkikos stone as the archaeological link between the cult of Divus Iulius, which commenced as the Roman imperial religion in 44 BCE, and Christianity, which became its substitute from the second or third century onward. The Orpheos Bakkikos stone would thus be both Orphic-syncretistic and Julian-Proto-Christian, with an Eastern Antonian tendency.¹²⁰

It turns out that, rather than representing a late forgery, the Orpheos gem could be as early as the first century before the common era, if indeed it served as a commemorative of the life, death, resurrection and deification of Julius Caesar or was his initiate ringstone.

Conclusion

In a world in which forgery of art and other artifacts unfortunately is rampant, it is rational and scientific to be skeptical of objects without a provenance. However, not every genuine artifact from antiquity extant today possesses a clear origin and history; hence, we cannot declare one and all forgeries simply for lack of a provenance.

Whether or not it has anything to do with Julius Caesar, the Orpheos Bakkikos gem appears to be a genuine artifact from antiquity, possibly dating to the century before the common era. In reality, there exists no rationale to assume that the Orpheos Bakkikos gem is a fake or that it is influenced by Christianity. On the contrary, there are many reasons to believe that the crucifixion motif represents a mythical theme included in the gospel story *because* of its popularity in pre-Christian antiquity.

All in all, there are excellent grounds to suppose that the Orpheos gemstone is genuine and that it may be older than proposed by previous scholars, who evidently were attempting to fit the artifact into the Christian timeline that presumed a historical Jesus crucified around 30 AD/CE.

¹¹⁹ Julius was said to descend from the Trojan hero Aeneas, whose mother was Venus. The Roman poet Lucretius (c. 99-c. 55 BCE) applied this Venusian motif to all the Aeneadae, including Julius and the rest of the Romans. (Weinstock, 23)

¹²⁰ Carotta, 21.

If pre-Christian, the Orpheos Bakkikos gem's existence serves as evidence of the motif of a god or human on a cross, centuries before Christ was depicted in like form. Since this crucifix or cruciform motif is commonly found in a number of cultures, including in myths, imagery and symbolism for thousands of years, we can surmise safely that its inclusion in the gospel story is likewise mythical, not historical, designed to incorporate a popular symbol into the new religion in order to attract followers.

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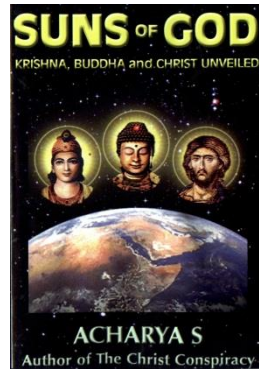
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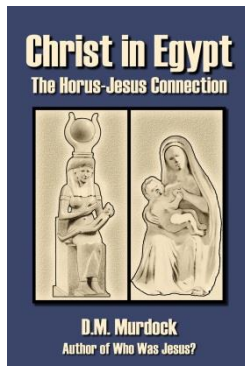
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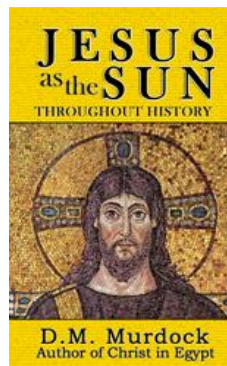
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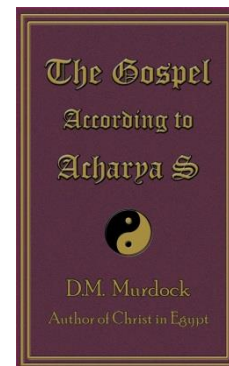
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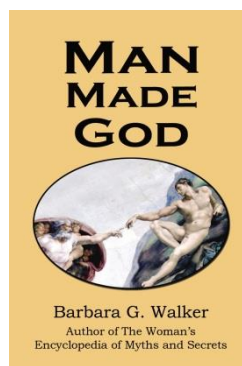


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